

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) An instrument for holding an intervertebral spacer, the instrument comprising:

a shaft having a proximal end forming a handle, and a distal end forming a claw subassembly;

said claw subassembly including a first pincer which is fixed at the distal end of the shaft and a second pincer which is pivotally coupled with said first pincer for rotating into and out of spacer holding association with said first pincer, wherein said second pincer is biased towards one of a spacer holding association position or out of a spacer holding association position; and

an actuation mechanism for selectively rotating said second pincer, wherein said first and second pincers have opposing inner curved surfaces that extend to a distal-most end of said instrument.

2. (previously presented) The instrument of claim 1, wherein said second pincer is spring biased away from said first pincer.

3. (currently amended) The instrument of claim 2, wherein the actuation mechanism comprises a sliding member mounted to the shaft which is selectively moveable in the distal direction by a force sufficient to overcome the bias of the spring, the distally directed movement of the sliding member thereby causing said second pincer to pivot toward said fixed first pincer, and the subsequent retraction of the sliding member in a proximal direction causes the sliding member to move away disengage—from said second pincer so as to permit said pincers to separate under the bias of the spring.

4. (currently amended) The instrument of claim 3, wherein said second pincer includes a tapered surface which is

~~contacted engaged~~—by a corresponding surface of the sliding member, said ~~contacting engagement~~ causes said second pincer to pivot relative to said first pincer.

5. (previously presented) A combination including the instrument of claim 1, the combination comprising:

an intervertebral spacer comprising a cylindrical member having an annular groove defining a central axial core portion and a pair of flange portions at opposing ends thereof; and

said claw subassembly engages the spacer at the central axial core.

6. (currently amended) An intervertebral spacer grasping instrument, comprising:

a pair of pincers, a first of said pair being fixed, and a second being pivotally coupled to said first pincer in one of an open-biased opposition or a closed opposition thereto, said first and second pincers having opposing inner curved surfaces that extend to a distal-most end of said instrument; and

a sliding element translatable into and out of ~~contactengagement~~ with said second pincer to close and open said pair of pincers, respectively.

7. (currently amended) The grasping instrument of claim 6, wherein:

said pair of pincers define an intervertebral spacer grasping enclosure having an access opening through which an intervertebral spacer can be passed for placement into the intervertebral spacer grasping enclosure when the sliding element is out of ~~contactengagement~~ with said second pincer; and

said intervertebral spacer is securely maintained between said first and second pincers when the sliding element has been translated into ~~engagement~~—contact with said second pincer.

8. (currently amended) The grasping instrument of claim 7, wherein said first and second pincers are mounted at the distal end of a common shaft, and the sliding element is translatable along said shaft, and wherein said second pincer has a portion thereof which is ~~contacted~~engageable by the sliding element to close said pair of pincers.

9. (currently amended) The grasping instrument of claim 8, wherein said second pincer is mounted to the common shaft by a pivot pin, and the portion of said second pincer which is ~~contacted~~engaged by the sliding element is a tapered surface, the angle of which tapered surface, when ~~contacted~~engaged by the sliding element, causes said second pincer to rotate about the pivot pin, closing said first and second pincers.

10. (previously presented) The instrument of claim 1, further comprising a pin extending through said first and second pincers for pivotally coupling said first and second pincers.

11. (previously presented) The grasping instrument of claim 6, further comprising a pin extending through said first and second pincers for pivotally coupling said first and second pincers.